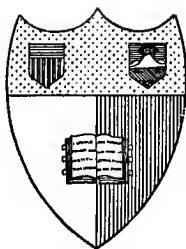


Poems

by

Edward L. Davison

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POEMS

By
Edward L. Davison

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TO
J. C. SQUIRE

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The Master at Home

(..... College, Cambridge.)

I

RECEPTION

CHEERFULLY is his well-worn greeting made,
Master and smiling host with kind white hair
And good intentions in a crowded hall ;
His Lady near him bowing in the shade
Of the monotonous oak-panelled wall
Where lifeless portraits keep their deathless stare.

The noisy drawing-room is overfull :
I squeeze within, lonely and very dull.

II

QUIZZING

“ That is the daughter of our lecturer,
They say she has ideas of her own.”

What could the man mean so to speak of her
And her ideas ? Her forehead had a frown ;
I heard her tell some freshman that he must
I know not what !—Ideas are dust . . . all dust.

III

NEAR THE WINDOW

Are their backs turned to the window
Because their eyes are blind ?

And is it a green meadow
Or a garden behind,
Where the sudden sunlight fills
The bank of daffodils ?

O listen ! Your well-bred voices
Drown a loud blackbird's song :
Listen, the Spring rejoices
It cannot last for long :
Is the gust in the great trees
Invisible to these ?

She is from Newnham or Girton,
And prettier than most,
There by the window curtain,
And our glances have crossed.
It must be her girl's heart heard
The sweet song of the bird.

.

Of all in this dull throng
You should have been the one
To hear the blackbird's song.
It seemed he asked the sun
Why we were not out there.
—You tidied up your hair !

You should have felt the spell
Of the Spring's loveliness.
Was it the breasts aswell
Under a summer dress,
Telling your womanhood,
Made me mistake your mood ?

Despite its harmonies
Mine is a heathen tongue,
And yours seemed pagan eyes
And you were very young.
Dreamed you of other joys ?
—I heard your drawling voice.

But I know your heart is old,
Or like these others, learned,
For there was no gleaming gold
In your eyes when you turned.
And of all to catch the sun's,
Yours should have been the ones !

IV

TEA IN THE DRAWING ROOM

Here in this clamour of crockery and speech
Cease your rebellious dreams, uncivil mind,
Lest in some distant reach
 Of your long journeying
 You should not find
 The way of your flight home.

 But I become,
Baresark on Icelandic glaciers ;
Hero of Sagas, he whose battle-axe
Crashed its great blade through skulls until the brains,
Bloody and grey, covered its shaft like wax :
Whose swimming vision failed him his last blow,
Whose score of wounds denied even Death its pains,
When he lay trampled in the frozen snow.

 And soon again,
Writhing, I wait my death,
 Terrified and alone,
Bound on a Druid's altar-stone,
 Smelling a score of slain ;
Or battling with leaden short sword in the ring
 Some animal
 Crouching against the wall,
 Ravenous and rampant, with his fierce hot breath
 Steaming to air as he prepares to spring.

.

And still this helpless mind must dare and do
 Whatever its mad spirit bid it to.

V

THE MANTELPIECE

A row of idols watch us from the shelf,
Stolid in horror, wonderfully cut
From stone and steel and ivory and clay.

Can they remember what a bloody glut
Of appetite they had in a younger day
When such as we bowed down to them to pray?

The Dean looks up, shaking his nervous self.
—I would give much to know the Dean's mind, but
He mutters "Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes," and turns away.

VI

COMING AWAY

He is going before them there,—the oldest Don,
Doubled beneath his gown that sweeps the ground
Near to his shuffling feet which hardly sound
So slowly they move on,
So little rise or fall.

Pass not too quickly by
Because of his lost youth,
Lest he should see and sigh
At some heretical
Gleam of the awful truth.

The Swan

(To Phillis and Edward Shanks)

THE swan has sailed down from her islet nest ;
Sailed slowly down in an uncertain dream
Of shallow waters and a resting moon,
Shadows inert and silences asleep,
To keep her tryst. The river through the woods
Offers no ripple to her moving breast,
Through drifting weed and lily-leaf she sails
Into the clearer stream, and under her
The faint reflection of her beauty swells :
—Strong wings like shells smoothed on the coral coast
Of some soft sea ; broad fans of feather ribbed
And folded close in easy layers, lain
And shut against the steep mount of her back ;
Her long neck curving and her head erect,
Held in a pride of pose in silhouette
Against the dusky osiers behind.
From her soft breast the shadows all divide ;
The water might be hollow holding her,
For wheresoe'er she swims, though swift or slow
She cannot change its calm
Even the silence seems to follow her.

Now pausing in the clear mid-stream she drifts
To gradual rest ; her slender neck released
Lifts in advancing undulation up
Towards the sky. Effortless wings unfold
To resurrect the sudden winds and dash
The river into clouded foam until,
Trampling with unseen feet the water-top,
She sways, distending pinion, neck and plume
In frantic luxury of splendour ! Then
With harsh and travelling cry that climbs the night
Subsides into the stream again, and now
The air is hushed around her ; clear and calm
The water grows and silence mantles it
And shadow, and the halting moon moves on.

The Window

EYE of my life, when winter hung the hills
And breath streamed wet above your painted
sills,
I stared beyond them, stared at staring snow,
Till you should fade and I prepare to go.

But the snow passed nor dallied on my going,
The mists fled and the warm new wind came blowing
Over the hills, the river shone again,
The larks arose to sing me out of pain.

And now the green is stealing from the summer,
Your glass recedes, daily the hills grow dimmer,
And once the Autumn casts away its wreath,
Eye of my life, you shall be eye to death.

At the Melodrama

WE from our box upon the prompter's side
Smiled at her dubious diamonds and the small
Vermilion Cupid's-bow rouged on her mouth,
Obvious in reality behind ;
A cruel shadow, thin and colourless,
Belying the crude innocence of her part.

Purity's enemy, the black-moustached,
Lavishly tempted her, but One there came
To save her,—lady-lead with the beak nose,
The unmistakable Semitic, cast
In painted features with thick golden hair
Gathered and slid from her swarthy neck.

.

There's a child poet in the gallery
Following every motion of her hands
And clumsy body with a gleaming eye
And lips held tense. And when the curtain falls
He will walk slowly through the rain and think . . .

I do not know what he will think, nor you.

Password

FALLS from a cloud the singing bird
 Into her nest of grass ;
 Say to me but a single word
 And I will let you pass

Between her winking stars the moon
 Pauses beyond the hill,
Whisper that word and whisper soon,
 And pass me if you will.

The wood grows darker, quieter
 Than ever yet it was ;
One word among the calm of air
 And I will let you pass.

Listened the waiting leaves all night,
 Shadow and bush and mound ;
The high moon shed a softer light ;
 There was not any sound.

The Coming of Winter

MIDNIGHT of sere October, ominous hour
Of starless dark, spreading dry mists around,
Upon whose silence crawls the stealthy frost
With pitiless crystal wilting leaf and flower,
And riming dew on grass and stone and ground,
Beyond thy mists wherein the world is lost
Didst thou obscure the far-removed moon,
That in her shadowy craters searching deep
Thou mightst wake Winter from his freezing sleep,
And guide him to the Autumn earth so soon ?

And thou, harsh noon, so fickle to thy sun,
With violent gust offending every tree
Till dappled leaves in fluttering thousands shaken
Whirl over lawns, and where slow rivers run
Float down, entangled drift, towards the sea,
Didst thou chide sunless Winter to awaken,
Telling of Equinox and snows asleep
In shaggy clouds that frown o'er peaks afar,
And stories of the frozen Northern Star,
And glaciers by some dizzy Alpine steep ?

Cast thy moist colours Autumn and begone,
Follow the far-flown swallows to warm lands
Ere Winter urge his winds to drive thee there.
Thy fallen leaves are stiff upon the lawn,
On river bank the bristling yew-tree stands
That has not shed a leaf in any year :
The crisp ice films above the brittle earth,
The shallow furrows thaw not to the rain,
And half the world has lit its fires again
To dream of Summer by the pleasant hearth.

Sahara

PATIENT she keeps her hungry reveries ;
Over her barren breasts the Arab rides ;
She dreams for ever of her vanished seas,
The shadowy coolness of caressing tides ;

The lust of her dead love Euroclydon
When he came floundering to her mighty bed ;
The writhing birth of huge Leviathan
In the dark time when her womb vomited.

Naked below the sun she still remains,
Hushed and regardless of her torrid drought
Till heaven forgets its vows, loosens the rains,
And from her plunging sands the geysers spout.

Conscientious Objector

HIS was the mastery of life
Who locked the doors on wrath,
And would not join the common strife
At the cold beck of death.

But singing in the shattered street
When it ran dim with blood,
Flung down his soul at England's feet,
And was not understood.

At St. Bedes

DOWN stinks the Don from Jarrow to the Slakes
By Simonside to poison the slow Tyne,
Calm as the placid bosom of the Styx
And blacker where its rancid banks incline
Up to the grassland, green on either side,
Suckled by every oozing change of tide.

Here kissed the stream the tired willows once
Beneath whose shade the studious Bede reclined,
When Thursday's busy lines shuddered response
To the snared trout, while sweetly smelled the wind
Over the unhedged fields, and richly shone
The Don's bright silver in the noonday sun.

In this Dark House

I SHALL come back to die
From a far place at last,
After my life's carouse
In the old bed to lie
Remembering the past
In this dark house.

Because of a clock's chime
In the long waste of night
I shall awake and wait
At that calm lonely time
Each sound and smell and sight
Mysterious and innate :
—Some shadow on the wall
When curtains by the door
Move in a draught of wind ;
Or else a light footfall
In a near corridor ;
Even to feel the kind
Caress of a cool hand
Smoothing the draggled hair
Back from my shrunken brow,
And strive to understand
The woman's presence there,
And whence she came, and how.

What gust of wind that night
Shall mutter her lost name
Through windows open wide,
And twist the flickering light
Of a sole candle's flame
Smoking from side to side,
Till the last spark it blows
Sets a moth's wings aflare
As the faint flame goes out ?

Some distant door may close ;
Perhaps a heavy chair
On bare floors dragged about
O'er the low ceiling sound,
And the thin twig of a tree
Knock on my window-pane
Till all the night around
Is listening with me,
While like a noise of rain
Leaves rustle in the wind.

Then from the inner gloom
The scratching of a mouse
May echo down my mind
And sound around the room
In this dark house.

The vague scent of a flower
Smelt then in that warm air
From gardens drifting in,
May slowly overpower
The vapid lavender,
Till feebly I begin
To count the scents I knew
And name them one by one,
And search the names for this.

Dreams will be swift and few,
Ere that last night be done,
And gradual silences
In each long interim
Of halting time awake,
Confuse all conscious sense.
Shadows will grow more dim,
And sound and scent forsake
The dark, ere dawn commence.

In the new morning then,
So fixed the stare and fast,
The calm unseeing eye
Will never close again.

.

I shall come back at last,
In this dark house to die.

To R. V. L.

(In Hampden Church)

IN shade and silence lain
Where earth and heaven meet,
We were the living twain,
The dead were at our feet.

And O the common thought
To think in that dim place
That sooner than we sought
We might be face to face

With reckonings uncast,
The due, the gain, the loss,
Forgetful at the last
Beneath a hasty cross ;

And no white monument
To tell a little fame,
The wayfare that you went,
The letters of my name.

A Minesweeper Sunk

(The Duty Chief Petty Officer to the Duty Writer)

ONLY one drifter down in the patrol !
Well that's damned fine !—Don't stand and
stare
Writer, for God's sake pile the coal ;
You'll find their service sheets filed over there.
Is that the list of 'em ? Make a rough note
In pencil on page three before you go ;
Use some of them buff forms and when you've wrote
To stop allotments mind you let me know
Down in the C.P.O's. canteen below.

Give us a hand on with me bloody coat.

In Judea

THE Bride of God has lain her head
At rest on Joseph's knee,
In hush of sleep her breath is dead,
Her hair falls loose and free ;
And Joseph smooths its rippling strands
Tenderly in his coarse great hands.

He thinks of sunny Nazareth
When Mary kissed him first,
Ere for God's love she brake her faith,
And lest his heart should burst
He turns his eyes away once more
From Jesus smiling by the door.

A Statue of Sleep

HER face is masked in sorrow ; loveliest
Of all Italia's goddesses whose fame
Was housed in sculptured stone, or found a rest
In the round syllables of a classic name.

In her close company I breathe her breath
And kiss her kiss : she wantons with all men.
Her everlasting presence is deep death,
But in her visitation is no pain.

Yet aches my sense at her long absences ;
I pray her at the eve for courtesy.
She hears and oh the passionate excess
When in the stealthy dawn she comes to me.

The Singer

LITTLE and fat he is with florid face ;
His oiled unpleasant head is glistening
Back to the chandelier. We wait a space
Dallying, laughter-like, at his unhastening
Uncomfortable bow. The lips give place
To a wide yawn, and we are listening. . . .

Lo ! This is he, unpreluded, divine,
Who sang to Saul of old. There is no grief
Other than his ; no hopelessness but his :
His soul is music, liquider than wine ;
He has our joy and sorrow, he, the thief,
And we must borrow from his silences !

A Poet Grows Old and Dies

HE has been lost so long in cloudy dreams,
Woven fantastic fallacies so long,
That a past poem of his making seems
Like the elusive music of a song
He heard long since, whose sweet few notes repeat,
Teasing the memory, faint and incomplete.

And now his age has seized him unawares ;
Old memories at last awake in him,
And he forgets his dreams to count the years
Since song and fancy have forsaken him :
After life's long vain voyaging he lands,
An old ghost wandering wailing on dark sands.

Gethsemane

SHADOWLESS stood the night's deep pit, alive
With unseen menaces.—The crested palms
Whispering slowly to a soundless wind,
The wailing of a broken-hearted bird,
And in response a hideous throated owl
Yelling like some bound demon. Afterward
Came a vast silence to the stifled air,
Save for the rustle of One garmented
Pale near the crumbling wall, and in the hush
The murmur of a bitter-spoken prayer.

A Fog

WHEN the fog sinks around him, cloud on cloud,
The friendless man abandons every aim ;
His dull eyes fail him and his sense is cowed
And no-one knows his face or speaks his name
In all the fading thousands of the crowd :
He cares not where he goes nor whence he came.

Now is he lost amidst the baffling night,
Misshapen wraiths of shadow round him loom ;
He stumbles lamely to some blur of white
Where warning voices through the darkness boom.
On a dim spiral stair his feet alight
And he descends into the thinner gloom.

Hushed in the pit the clamour all abates,
Numb and astonished roams his sense around,
Light splits the gloom above, and as he waits
Falls from the shaft a drawn and windy sound,
And pale faced people staring through the gates
Of lifts descending on the Underground.

The Sundial

THE sundial forgets its ancient trust
Pedestalled in the weed upon the lawn,
Covered with ivy spiderweb and dust,
Remembering still in twilight and in dawn
This ruin of garden in a summer prime
Somewhere among the sober past of Time ;

Lovers that played about it in the noon
Or watched that square obliterated face
When it cast shadows for the jealous moon,
And heard a sheltered cricket at its base
Before the grass grew ragged at the foot,
Or any crevice hid an ivy root.

A Grave

BURY me when I am dead
With an acorn in my hand,
Plant us deep for a long sleep
In a grassy land.

Set no granite on that grave,
Let no yew tree cover it,
Nor a weeping willow wave
Long leaves over it.

Rain and dew of dawn shall soak,
Suns arouse the pregnant sod,
Till at last a mighty oak
Keeps my grave untrod.

Gabriel in Eden

ETERNAL season of the changeless leaf—
Hushing God's garden in the sunlit space
Of day with an immeasurable peace
Bred of the coloured songbirds and the flowers,
The rapid insects and the fervid beasts,
And all calm sense of sound and sight and smell,—
Consequent of what great offence to God
Wakes the strange tremor in thy darkening air
Till skylarks make cessation of all song,
And busy bees dissuaded from their toil
Seek their loud hives within the hollow tree ?

O lovely Eden ! Whence the ruinous clouds
That drift and surge across thy failing sun ?
Lo ! startled birds seek covert in thick trees,
And all the beasts are huddled in the gloom
Of powerful branches, cowering afraid.

Wield ye the fiery sword O Cherubim
The Outcast of Archangels comes again !

The Prodigal

COME home for sight grows feeble now,
Our hope is like a dream ;
A stranger guides the rusted plough
And drives the sturdy team.

And the frost prowls abroad to-night
Upon the moony air,
And there's nothing in the firelight
To tell us how you fare.

Long shadows flicker on the wall
And crawl across the floor,
But never any knock at all
Sounds at the ready door.

Slow hours invade the lonely day
And sleep deserts the night ;
Unpausing seasons pass away
While grey hairs turn to white.

And when you cross the sunny hill
Some noon in a new Spring,
The little cottage will be still,
Somewhere a bird may sing,

But you will see the rotting thatch,
The garden still and bare,
And you perhaps may lift the latch
But no-one will be there.

Before Dawn

F AINT from the inner sky the rising day
Makes pale the branches of unmoving trees,
Besieging night that shortens its delay
And clings in mist and melts, and has not ease.

Slowly the shadows over earth dispel,
Dawn's tears are cool among the sleeping grass,
Now drips the dewdrop from the foxglove bell,
Light smites the heaven with a sword of brass

And day is come. Oh ! Day is come again.
Hark to the world that zings aloud and long.
Arouse Beloved ! It will sing in vain
If you awaken not to join the song.

The Trees

I DID not know your names and yet I saw
The handiwork of Beauty in your boughs,
I worshipped as the Druids did, in awe,
Feeling at Spring my pagan soul arouse
To see your leaf-buds open to the day,
And dull green moss upon your rugged girth,
The hoary sanctity of your decay,
Life and Death glimmering upon the Earth.

After the Rain

COOL fields have drunk the drowsy rain,
And clouds the silver sun ;
They shake him out below again
And the dusk has begun.

Sweet smells the earth and sweet the grass,
The shower shadows fill
The distant sky like bars, and pass
Away behind the hill.

The crawling furrows steam with heat,
The sodden meadows smoke,
The valley where their vapours meet
Is covered with a cloak.

Not from this hilltop's knuckled fist
Shall any challenge go,
Nor from those peaceful tents of mist
Shall any bugle blow.

But there may sound a twilight chime,
A hidden fox may bark,
A chattering squirrel nestwards climb,
Or a bird sing in the dark.

A Barn

IT stands by the valley of the stream,
Grey and very silent in a place
Where Silence is the Minister to dream,
And Beauty is the mark upon its face.

The deaths-head moths shimmer on the moon,
Fey bats flit across the broken eaves,
And there in a fantastical festoon
The moving shadows fall of many leaves.

Forgotten of the world except by me,
Slowly the old barn crumbles into clay ;
Nights shine on it with star embroidery,
Quietly the seasons pass away.

Lights on the Tyne

OLD lights that burn across the Tyne at night
And in its shadowy bosom peer and swim,
Each in your ancient place ;—In summer bright,
In winter dim.

Old lights that specked the bank of dark until
The shivering river drank your scattered gleams
Into its glass, and let the colours spill
Among my dreams,

When I came down from Tynemouth, ten years old,
Aspiring, penniless and fresh of tongue,
How you lit up my little woes with gold
Since I was young.

At Tyne Dock

THERE were no trees upon our Avenue :
The gutters stank. At number sixty-nine
Mr. and Mrs. Pile and thirteen kids
Lived in two rooms whose walls were coffin lids,
And Mrs. Behrsing kept a seamen's home
In six rooms at the largest corner house ;
Stood at the door in her old dirty blouse,
Smoked a clay pipe, and drank unwatered rum.

But I sat still and watched my mother cry
And read Hans Andersen without a care,
And some old tale about the golden hair
Of a Princess which swept across the sky
Netting the stars, and heard the drunken crew
Fight and curse Christ upon the Avenue.

To My Mother

SOON I must spend a long night here alone
Before a slow red fire,
Dreaming about my days from dark to dawn,
Till the last glow dies out and the ash grows cold,
And the night is gone.

But the rustle of cinders falling in the hearth
Shall rouse me suddenly
Out of my sunken thoughts, and I shall know
How life has dealt with me ; what task the earth
Has set me to.

And I shall shudder in the gradual cold,
Calling awhile in vain
For the mild infancy I dreamed again,
Until there comes a quiet sleep to cloud
Knowledge and pain.

The pangs of straying passions shall be stilled,
And all my thoughts that hour ;
My many sins shall be hushed up in it :
Poem and dream together quietly
I shall forget.

Of the whole childhood that is lost and gone,
That gentle sleep shall be
The only part remaining to me then ;
And it shall seem that I am rocked upon
Your breast again.

The Mind Besieged

A LONELY castle was this Mood of mine
Whose anxious ramparts challenged wind and
cloud,
Mountain and moon with banners leonine.

But the battalions of Event abide
In sleepless siege around, and all the proud
And weary garrison is stupefied ;

And only from that brooding citadel
On the dark battlements resounds aloud
Some failing tread of Thought, the sentinel.

In a Wood

UNQUIET wind, be still, be still
In the deep wood this sleepy night,
Your mutter sets the leaves athrill
Ere the moon's lamp is yet alight
And, as the stars arise
In my Beloved's eyes,
The love life cannot kill
Is beaming now ;
While round her brow
Like a faint halo circles her dark hair
Whence light has stolen away
Since yesterday.

Wind in your woodland die,
Lest her least loving word
Should pass me by
And be unheard
Drownèd within your sigh.

Visitation

WHEN you are gone from earth
And I brood here alone,
Where the flame fails below the last charred
ember

Within the midnight hearth :
—When every dream is done,
Will you look down upon me and remember ?

Will you look down with eyes
Lovely as pitiless
Because you understand my ignorance,
And cannot sympathise
With the poor witlessness
That sees you not, and makes you no response ?

Or when you see me grey
And naked as a child,
Will you put up your hands towards your brows and
say,
“ This was my lover for a day
Who very seldom smiled ! ” ?
(I have no angel's tongue to tell the way).

“ He who was strong and young
Has grown both weak and old ;
This paragon of vain philosophies
Stammers with foolish tongue.”
—Or will you turn
Lips to be kissed, and fall on distant knees ?

To

THOU art my World ! In thee I live and love.
My sight and 'speech and knowledge are of thee;
It is in thee I pray and think and move;
Thine are all beauties that enlighten me.

Bright are thy days and all thy nights are bright ;
Theirs is the calm deep peace wherein I dream ;
Even the dreams are thine, and my delight
To sing is thine and thou art all the theme.

In thee I hope and suffer, and of thee
My pleasure is, and all my grief is thine ;
Every contriving of my gaiety
Thou gavest with all else ; — nothing is mine !

And thus thou art my World ! In thee alone
Is my content since thou hast shared with me,
Even so brief a while, all these, thine own,
The best and loveliest impulses of thee.

The Shadow

DOROTHY slept and o'er her eyes
My thoughts betook their dancing way,
Her lips with quiet smiles were curled,
I saw her teeth in white array
Within her mouth whence laughter flies
That is apart from all the world.

I wakened her and from her eyes
Sleep fled afar and left them dull :
Then died my thoughts thereon and where
Her smiles had seemed so beautiful,
Sped forth a hundred little lies
To shield the dream she would not share.

O Shadow, Shadow, what are you ?
Not speech can search your shallow home ;
Silence can never fathom it,
Nor pleading eyes persuade you come.
I see your swift shape passing through
The doors, but it is vain to wait.

Oh Heart, Be Quiet

OH Heart, be quiet for the sake of Faith ;
Rest for a lonely hour,
Content until her beauty wakeneth,
Knowing so well
She was a flower
Gathered too soon because of a sweet smell.

Yet be not angry that you gathered her
Before her perfect prime.
Summer's sun glare might so have withered her
That she had died
Ere raining time ;
Then might you well have been unsatisfied.

But now your thoughts shall be a kinder sun,
Your sorrows a soft rain,
And of your songs even the poorest one
Shall be a dew
To make again
Her every essence rarefied anew.

The Lost Mistress

SHE has passed by in the receding file
Of women lost, where the remembering years
Fade in the youth of love ! There was a smile
Shining within her eyes behind the tears.

O statelier than Helen ; statelier
Than Cressida with all her careless vows
She stands where Lilith and Delilah are
With the hair gathered from their splendid brows.

“ Grieve not for any honour you may mar
In that great company, but love again :
Troilus and Menelaus my playmates are,
Adam and Samson ; they were noble men.”

To a Song

WE watched her lips together, thou and I ;
Lips never made to lie.
We heard her words, and then, so glad we
were,

Listening, hearing her,
That we forgot her past unkindliness,
Drowning each last distress
In sweet belief. But faith is dead again,
So often resurrected but in vain.

Long evenings waiting words when she was dumb ;
Letters that did not come :
The creeping painfulness of vigils kept
When elsewhere she slept
Rapt in long dreams with comfort and content :
Nights when no angel sent
Sleep, deep and kind, to close our tired eyes,
When mad thoughts cleft, like cries
Breaking the silence of some holy place,
The marches of far space,
Calling her spirit to remember us,
And all the tremulous
Poems and songs we sang because we loved,
Which always she approved,—
Piteous, forgotten in an evening !
—Thus did we cease to sing.

Song ! Who shall know when we are put away
 How greatly we have felt ?
This is the part of every lover's play,
 And every man is dealt
Pain with his little love. Those who shall read,
 (If ever any read),
May say, " He spoke but simple platitudes " :
 How can they know our moods ?
 Our joy, our pain ?

And have we sung an hour together now ?
 Thou hast been sweet to me,
 And anyhow
 'Twill be
Good to be hushed again.

Sunday at Kensington

TO-NIGHT already is a worn-out dream,
The memory of elusive lights that gleam
In a dim mist o'er roads that have no end,
And solitudes that hold not any friend.

The din of booming bells at a far distance ;
A girl who hurried past ; the tired persistence
Of hollow echoes following the feet ;
Some cautious motor throbbing down a street.

Thou poor unhappy heart ! Shall aimless walking
Lose sorrow on the way ? In thy steps stalking
Her shadow hunts thee, mocking thou should'st deem
To-night already as a worn-out dream.

The Sunken City

GLITTERS no scale nor any fin
Between these blind basaltic walls,
The seaweeds wave about within
The water of the pillared halls.

And here the old crustaceans
Crawl patiently across the sand
With twisting eyes that turn askance,
And ugly pincers that expand.

Light's essence in the gloomy sea
Through opal strained and emerald,
Tinges the spread anemone,
And pearls of milk and rings of gold.

But in this watery depth no more
Shall sunlight break the sunken dusk,
No vagrant beam of stars explore
The secrets of the city's husk.

And when the climbing tentacles
Of some sleep-swimming octopus
Disturb a ruined temple's bells,
And set the deep sea clamorous,

The ships that ride a league above
Hear not those drownèd chimes, nor know
That where their great propellers move
Atlantis lies a league below.

Nocturne

BE thou at peace this night
Wherever be thy bed,
Thy slumbering be light,
The fearful dreams be dead
Within thy lovely head ;
God keep thee in His sight.

No hint of love molest
Thy quiet mind again ;
Night fold thee to her breast
And hush thy crying pain ;
Let memory in vain
Conspire against thy rest.

So may thy thoughts be lost
In the full hush of sleep.
Lest any sight accost
Thine eyes to make them weep,
In darkness buried deep
For ever be thy ghost.

The Phœnix

WHO sayeth Love shall cease ?

W Though the flame fold her fast,
This fire is not her last ;
Not in this ash, aghast,
Shall Phœnix find her peace.

Sonnets

I

I HAD a vision of myself grown old,
Time-seared and loveless in a lonely place,
With sorrow's marks enwrinkled on my face
And passion and desire within me cold.
One solace had I ; ancient memory
Cheered my desponding spirits in the day,
But through the night's long vigils when I lay
In sleeplessness, it was mine enemy.

For faces I had loved came thronging by,
And visions of the places I had known
When love and youth their flowers on me had strewn,
Hovered before my recollection's eye.
But in those phantom ranks that swiftly flew
Back to the black dead realms I saw not you.

II

DULL on the stifled sea and dead asleep,
Soul-strangling weighs the whisper laden air
Beyond the cliff's fringe and the sand-dunes
bare

The dimming moon makes midnight shadows creep.
Was it some harmless dream resolved that name
Upon her pallid lips, or secret truth,
Too long suppressed, issuing from her mouth
Still warm with my hot kisses ? Can I blame
The unconscious mind of sleep for what she said
Or deem it was the fervid soul awake
Even in the realms of rest ?—God, could I take
The thoughts within that golden pillowed head
And know them as 'Thou know'st them, would I lie
Bound to her beauty thus, or knowing, die ?

III

THE snare of sorrowing beauty breaks at last ;
Pity of idle tears sweeter than smile,
And all the praise of speech are overcast
When loveliness has lived its little while ;
And passions lay their changing moods aside,
Promise forgets the least of things he said,
The swift years quench the pleasure of high pride
And ruin all the majesty they made.
Let Love to-day be done some cruel wrong
And Loyalty awhile become remiss,
Rebuke can be forbidden by a song,
Unfaithfulness forgiven for a kiss :
But were thy beauty now what it shall be,
Pardon might not be bought so easily.

IV

THE world is wrong and man is in decay ;
Love is a bargain to be bought and sold,
And whoso has the biggest bag of gold
Can change all nature into common clay.
The Mean command and Greatness must obey ;
Genius starves in garrets as of old,
Vice judges virtue, sympathy is cold,
Hypocrisy most utter in its sway.

Gomorrah, Feed your lust until it fail,
Gather your titles, barter with your shame ;
Sodom drink deep and well while yet you can,
Lot on his knees may yet for you avail ;
These sins may be forgiven. Not the same
The cruelty of man to fellow man.

I DID not know when Beauty offered God
 That God and Beauty were so near akin,
 There was no sense that told me of my sin
 Save Faith, the Outcast, whom I counted odd ;
 I murdered her with the least casual nod,
 And decked my spirit in bright robes to win
 And welcome Truth that would not enter in
 Save by mine eyes, and they misunderstood.

But Beauty spoke, and God was in the sound,
 And Love was in the words, and sweet they were,
 So that the better nature was unbound,
 Prodigal virtue came and she was fair.
 There is more sweetness on the dusty ground
 Than in the scented regions of the air.

VI

MY heart has worked its miracles by day
In the full glare of noon until my sight
Saw darkness in the sun's transparent ray,
And shallow distance stooping in the height.
And it has worked its miracles by night
When blind eyes staring on the visible dark
Behold it shed such plenitude of light
That the day's clouded beauties were made stark.

This mystery's most powerful assay
On sight and sense ; this secret unison
Of night that sheds dark shadows over day,
And day that lends the night a noon of sun
Shall ever be, though no man knows or tells
Of how my heart has worked its miracles.

VII

TO-NIGHT in weariness remembering thee
My heart leapt up in the forbidding gloom
And every shadow in the fire-lit room
Spake of thy peace and beauty unto me.
Then did I murmur to them quietly
The love I may not utter nor assume,
But the words echoed back, as in a tomb
Death answering Life might whisper "Vanity."

And I forgot the promise of thine eyes
Afterwards when the second silence came ;
My unavailing patience I forgot.
I stood before thee calling twice and thrice
The ruin of thy soft bewildering name,
And thou didst hear me then but answered not.

VIII

POEMS, when all life's tutelage is done,
And you, my golden trumpets shake the air,
When all my days are funeralled in one,
And hope and love lie buried with despair :
When from these battlefields fair cities rise
And golden crops shine on the shattered soil,
And over fleets of sunken merchandise
Great ships go riding home with richer spoil ;
Let strong storms beating down the wounded dark
Swallow the land where once my life was played,
And livid lightning lay the heaven stark
Over the ruin where my grave is laid ;
And let my spirit fare the thunder through
Singing aloud to earth alive in you.



Three Poems to J. C. S.

Cambridge, 1919

GREEN lawns in the old court this quiet hour
Are pale upon the gloom, and paler grow
With the slow passage of the moon to power.

And the receding reaches of the sky
Framed in these cloistral windows, deeper glow
At her ascension.—Body, could you die,

Now in this dead night-time a sleeping space
Loosening my spirit from your wasting shroud,
How would it rise and hover in this place !

Search the gray walls and in the higher air
Hear the heavens' harmony prolonged aloud,
And all its mystery and splendour share ;

Deified for awhile with them in One,
Building aloft a deathless Pantheon.

The Inspiration of Dead Poets

OUT of the river's bed, out of the stone,
Rise phantom company that loved this place ;
Come from your graves but leave me not alone.

In your youth's likeness or your age's change,
Out of your death's deep rest your spirits raise
Though the long centuries between be strange.

Come to these courts of night where once you were,
Quicken my spirit for your dead life's sake,
Cleanse its soiled beauties, set its sense astir.

Here while the moon's full circle falls again
Answer the hungering prayer-like dreams I make,
Inspire my spirit,—let them not be vain !

Like stirring pinions on the air they come.
Who watching God at night could still be dumb ?

III

The Inspiration of the Living

POET and friend of friends, beloved of me,
Even as my spirit your steep pathway climbs,
Darkness is folded round your golden tree.

And the Spring dawn, filling its boughs with birds
Knows not at all of those Autumnal times,
The older year of your sweet singing words ;

Thus is my heart that grows towards your heart,
And, since its lesser beauty cannot find
The clearer music of your lovelier art,

Arrays itself in younger colouring,
And fills its voice with songs of younger kind
Hiding the songs its after years may sing.

Until when all of them be sung and said,
It ushers you among your kindred dead.

FINIS.

